



## W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume II: The Arch-Poet 1915-1939

By R. F. Foster

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The first volume in Roy Foster's magisterial biography of W.B. Yeats was hailed as "a work of huge significance" (*The Atlantic Monthly*) and "a stupendous historiographical feat" (*Irish Sunday Independent*). Now, the eagerly awaited second volume explores the complex poetic, political, and personal intricacies of Yeats's dramatic final decades, a period that saw the Easter Rebellion, the founding of the Irish state in 1922, and the production of Yeats's greatest masterpieces.

In the conclusion of this first fully authorized biography, Foster brilliantly illuminates the circumstances--the rich internal and external experiences--that shaped the great poetry of Yeats's later years: "The Wild Swans at Coole," "Sailing to Byzantium," "The Tower," "The Circus Animals Desertion," "Under Ben Bulbin," and many others. Yeats's pursuit of Irish nationalism and an independent Irish culture, his continued search for supernatural truths through occult experimentation, his extraordinary marriage, a series of tempestuous love affairs, and his lingering obsession with Maud Gonne are all explored here with a nuance and awareness rare in literary biography. Foster gives us the very texture of Yeats's life and thought, revealing the many ways he made poetry out of the "quarrel" with himself and the upheaval around him. But this consummate biography also shows that Yeats was much more than simply a lyric poet and examines in great detail Yeats's non-poetic work--his essays, plays, polemics, and memoirs. The enormous and varied circle of Yeats's friends, lovers, family, collaborators and antagonists inhabit and enrich a personal world of astounding energy, artistic commitment and verve; while the poet himself is shown returning again and again to his governing preoccupations, sex and death.

Based on complete and unprecedented access to Yeats's papers and written with extraordinary grace and insight, *W.B. Yeats, A Life* offers the fullest portrait yet of the private and public life of one of the twentieth century's greatest poets.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The explosive era in both Irish history and Yeats's poetry justify the length of the second volume of Oxford historian Foster's masterful life of Yeats. Again Foster approaches Yeats's memoirs with skepticism, shrewdly and scrupulously applying the historical facts to Yeats's self-made image and his poetry. The result adds a unique, superb perspective on Yeats's poetic treatment of the Easter Uprising and subsequent civil war, his eventual disenchantment with the new Irish Free State and the restless philosophical questing of his last years, up to his death just before Ireland's break from Great Britain in WWII. Following Responsibilities in 1914, Yeats had hoped to start a domestic phase in his life with his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees and his homesteader purchase of Ballylee castle. Instead, this time of upheaval saw him apotheosize two martyrs, Maude Gonne's husband in "Easter 1916," and Great War casualty Robert Gregory, in "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death." Foster's consummate treatment of the Irish Free State's violent birth further illuminates Yeats's best work in *The Wild Swans at Coole* and *The Tower* with a vividness rarely found in biography. More personal matters, such as automatic-writing seances with his wife and his theosophical treatise *The Vision*, are of less interest to the historian-biographer than Yeats's public figure, including his battles with Catholic censorship and his dubious but brief association with the "Blueshirt" fascist faction. Even as history caught up with and overtook the Free State senator and Nobel laureate, Foster splendidly rounds out the Celtic Twilight bard's inner revolution in his magnificent twilight years.

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## **Review**

"A great and important work, a triumph of scholarship, thought, and empathy such as one would hardly have thought possible in this age of disillusion. It is an achievement wholly of a scale with its heroic subject."--John Banville, *New York Review of Books*

"Marvelous.... The major poems are swiftly, meticulously and deeply read..... They startle one into a renewed sense of their magnificence.... Yeats is a great subject, none greater in 20th-century literature, and 'The Arch-Poet' is the book he deserves, a classic."--Adrian Frazier, *New York Times Book Review*

"Triumphant.... *The Apprentice Mage* gave promise of a masterwork and the promise is fulfilled in *The Arch-Poet*. What we have now is one of the great biographies, as affectionate as it is scholarly, intellectually equal to the tasks it sets itself.... Roy Foster exemplifies the virtues of that Irish intellect so often invoked by Yeats himself, independent, vigorous, liberal and, on occasion, consciously provocative."--Seamus Heaney, *Financial Times*

"Magnificent.... The Yeats who emerges from these pages is allowed to be haughty and humble, polemicist and priest, prig and profligate, arch-poet in the sense of 'first poet' but also in the sense of 'clever, cunning, crafty, roguish, waggish.' Violet Martin's assessment of Yeats's impact on Irish poetry, that he had 'flung open a great window,' may now be justly applied to Foster's own achievement in *W. B. Yeats: A Life*."--Paul

Muldoon, *The Times*, London

"A model of the serious literary life. It is learned and scholarly, but the book never fails to carry its learning lightly. It is astonishingly detailed, more so than any other Yeats biography, but the details never clog or slow down the narrative.... His manner of presentation has a good humored sureness of touch throughout; this is no dry-as-dust final reckoning."--*The Economist*

"It is the great achievement of the second volume of Roy Foster's superb biography that it delivers us late Yeats in all his troublesome immediacy. Foster does this not just by cutting across the record with new facts from the archive--itself a considerable feat, given that half a dozen biographers have already been over the ground--but by constantly reconfiguring what seems familiar."--John Kerrigan, *London Review of Books*

"It is an enormous achievement, not simply in size--the two books together come to more than 1,400 pages--but of biographical art: no future literary biographer should put pen to paper without studying Mr. Foster's example. His knowledge of Yeats's life and work is complete; what is rarer, his searching inquiry never damages his sympathetic reverence for his subject, and vice versa. Most striking of all, Mr. Foster--a historian, not a literary critic--has a deep and subtle grasp of the Irish history that shaped Yeats, and that Yeats shaped."--Adam Kirsch, *New York Sun*

"Everything about the work is first-rate: the scholarship, the literary criticism, Foster's lucid and civilized style. It is hardly imaginable that there will be a successor."--Jeffrey Hart, *National Review*

"An ardor steeled by judgment and prose that is all brains and style."--Richard Eder, *New York Times*

"A definitive life of Ireland's best-loved poet.... Yeats once described his art to Ezra Pound as 'an accident in one's search for reality.' In this lively new book Foster captures all the richness of that reality, creating a balanced view of Yeats's poetry and his politics alike."--*Newsweek International*

"Mr. Foster is fully equal to the demands of this many-sided story. He is both an urbane writer and a precise one. He marshals his facts with a skill that ensures that they never impede the narrative flow. He has a shrewd insight into the complications of Yeats's personality and a sure grasp of the social contexts within which the poet lived and moved."--John Gross, *Wall Street Journal*

"I have never read a biography of any poet that has conveyed so clearly the genius of its subject and the talent of its author."--Frank Kermode, *Los Angeles Times*

"Foster shows in this learned and engaging biography that Yeats's life, however elevated the realms in which it unfolded, was nothing if not messy.... Foster's disentangling of the complicated skein of Irish political and revolutionary activity over the broad period under consideration is one of the book's great strengths. But it is the fantasia of Yeats's personal life that is most compelling." --Christopher Cahill, *Atlantic Monthly*

"Yeats emerges from Foster's account of him as a man among men--no saint, not even a sage, yet endlessly compelling."--Denis Donoghue, *Harper's*

"A formidable scholarly achievement. The research that informs it is staggering; its critical dissections are delicate and acute; and its supple, lucid prose is splendidly stylish.... Grippingly readable and intellectually rich, the book is without doubt one of the mightiest biographies of our age."--Terry Eagleton, *The Nation*

"Foster has emerged from the massive archive with a story impressively in order. In a triumph of deft arrangement, he intertwines the historical, the literary, the professional, and the personal throughout the sixteen briskly advancing chapters of this second volume."--Helen Vendler, *The New Republic*

"Foster has quite magnificently done his best to help us reach into and read W. B. Yeats. To recommend this book to others is an honor."--*Toronto Globe and Mail*

"Foster's knowing, richly detailed investigation is a remarkable achievement, essential to serious students of Yeats's life and work."--*Kirkus Reviews*

#### About the Author

**Roy Foster** is Carroll Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford and a fellow of Hertford College. His books include *Charles Stewart Parnell: The Man and His Family*, *Lord Randolph Churchill: a Political Life* (OUP, 1981), *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, and *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland*. The prize-winning first volume of this biography, *W.B. Yeats, A Life. I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* was published by OUP in 1997.

#### Users Review

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As people who live in the particular modest era should be up-date about what going on or details even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era that is certainly always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe may update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the

problems coming to you is you don't know what type you should start with. This W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume II: The Arch-Poet 1915-1939 is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

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